This state of affairs which is found among all the Chaco Indians is present also in the other savage nations of America, though admittedly, there are some -- in North America for instance -- among whom the existence of other invisible and good powers or beings have been recognized, called "manitos" and "oquis" by some.

Regarding this problem the Americans reason rather naively, though with a certain amount of wit: "why should one worry," they say, "about a being who is by nature good? Surely we need fear no evil from him because if he is good he will not wish to harm anyone." A metaphysician would say the same thing.

It must be confessed that all religions are a little weak regarding this (for want of a better term) original sin; for all preach or impose expiatory sacrifices to placate the supreme being's wrath.

Among those Chaco Indians who still preserve some hazy tradition rooted in the missionaries' teachings, a certain ceremony prevails, possibly the only one of a religious nature, which parodies a Christian rite. From time to time they gather around their old men and chiefs, the women on one side, the men on the other. In the center, on a pile of flowers they place an a'hót, a child who is to be a witch doctor. While at these meetings they talk, smoke and drink, and then go their separate ways saying that they have "been at mass." The witch doctors keep up a constant conversation with the God Child (1), and report back to the people what he says.

1. This function of "Child Witch Doctor" may be an Indian custom because something similar to it is to be found amongst the other Chaco Indians. (Ed.)

In this ceremony as in all others the wizard or witch doctor always bends forward, covers himself, directs his speech downwards toward the ground (beneath the surface of which are the a'hóts). He first speaks in his normal tone of voice and then answers himself in penetrating, muffled tones which he varies to suit the nature of the particular a'hót, and the people think

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 S17 Mataco S17

Choroti SK6

I have so far only spoken of the dances and other rites which take place at the preparation of the sacred drinks. During the algaroba season, festivals are held almost continuously, and these festivals are chiefly celebrated with drinking-bouts and dancing. Those of the Chaco Indians who have been in contact with the whites and seen the great festival with which, in Argentine and Boliva, they celebrate their carnival in February say that the algaroba season is their own carnival time and that they, too, have their carnival dances. The dances which among the Choroti take place at that time have partly been described before in connection with the customs practised by these Indians at courtship and marriage. In addition to the customary courtship dance *Avúshe*, the great festival, which is called *lāknene*, is celebrated with two more dances, those called *Ahlénta* and *Jóhlōki*. *Jóhlōki* is the name by which the Choroti call the Tobas, a fact that seems to indicate that the Choroti have borrowed the dance from their neighbours. The Tobas themselves call the dance *Nahotti*. It is a ring-dance; the dancing men are arranged in a circle and have their arms round each other's waists, moving round to the right or to the left to the rhythm of a chant. The *Ahlénta* again is identical with the Toba dance *Nomi*. Nevertheless, the Choroti seem to have borrowed it from their southern neighbours, the Ashluslay Indians on the lower Pilcomayo, a fact that may be inferred from the name; for just as *Jóhlōki* means »the Toba dance«, so *Ahlénta* means »the Ashluslay dance« (Choroti *Ahle* = Ashluslay). I would add in this connection that the dances of the Chaco tribes are, in the main, common to all the tribes; there are certain dances which occur among different tribes under different names.

The chants sung at the dances are rather monotonous and are composed of a series of words which apparently have no meaning; for instance in the *Jóhlōki*:

Hä-e-sa-alia,
Hiáh-hia-ália,
He-éh-hia-ália, hia-ália,
Hi-áh,
Hä-he-éh, hä-he-éh,
Hä-se-éh, hä-se-éh, hä-se-éh, etc.

Only the younger unmarried men perform these dances, the older ones being constantly engaged in drinking algaroba beer (*atās*). Unmarried girls are allowed to be present, but as we have seen they do not as a rule

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755 [114] In the course of the mission to the Argentinian Chaco of which I was in charge during 1932-1933, I had the opportunity of being present at a certain number of ceremonies for the expulsion of illnesses, or evil spirits.

[753] [774] The Matako /Mataco/ Indians do not seem to be acquainted with any other medicine than magical medicine; that is normal since the illness takes the image of the sick person and not his body.

Among the ceremonies described below, a distinction can be made between those from which the whole village benefits and those from which only a single sick person benefits.

Ceremony for the Expulsion of Illnesses for All the Village

(April 8, 1933).

755 This ceremony took place in the morning in the open air
756 rather far from the houses, and was carried out by all the medi-
783 cine men /the English term is used/ of the village. They were
796 arranged in a row facing east, and all had a maraca and a bone
[534] whistle in their hands. Some of them were carrying bands of rattles, either in the hand, slung over the shoulder, or hooked
[242] over the elbows. Some officiants were dressed in red wool ceremonial shirts spangled with rings of shells, and others in war
[237] shirts made of caraguata thread. Almost all were wearing red headbands decorated with feathers or hats adorned with ostrich feathers, and most had a bunch of ostrich feathers in the hand.
[302] The faces of the principal medicine men were daubed with red and black, and those of the women with red. Facing the row of officiants were planted several arrows, points down, and a lance with the point up. In the course of the ceremony a bunch of ostrich feathers was attached to the top of the lance. When I arrived at the spot, I noticed a young /212/ man crushing ha'tax seeds in a gourd which the medicine men would take later.

/212 cont./

755 The ceremony consisted of a song without words, identical
756 to the one the medicine men make heard during the treatment
783 of illnesses. The singing was given rhythm by the rattling of
796 the maracas, and, from time to time, by the sound of the bands of rattles and hoofs and blasts of the whistles. Each whistle blast marks a new stage in the performances connected with the ceremony (new metamorphosis of the spirit of the medicine man, as well as his arrival or departure from a given place). The maraca was sometimes held in a threatening manner as if to repulse an invisible being; the same gesture was made by those who held ostrich feathers. In turn, without interrupting the ceremony, one or another of the officiants took the ha'tax powder. One of the officiants ran behind and in front of his colleagues, dusting them from head to toe with a feather in his hand; he was assisted by another man, who made the rattles and little bells on their backs jingle. After having taken some ha'tax the officiants began to sing again, to brandish their maracas, and to make threatening gestures with them or with the feathers. Some medicine men were singing the song appropriate for their spirits, without concerning themselves with the recitative chants of their confreres.

The direct offensive against the illness followed these preliminaries: some individuals stopped out of the row, brandishing their maracas and feathers violently, and then returned to their places. Another began to throw up some dirt with his foot and was immediately followed by another who, seizing handfuls of dust, threw it in front of himself. Then one of them unsheathed his liana-cutter and began to cut the grass around him; his example was followed by almost the entire group, which threw itself into the assault on the illness. Some obstinately set upon one spot, as if they had at last driven the enemy into a corner, and beat it with redoubled blows of their liana-cutters or feather brooms, and then stamped on it as though they were burying their victim. The attack on the illness lasted rather long and was executed with great seriousness.

/212 cont./

755 756 783 796 The follow-up to the ceremony was what we could call a general disinfection. The medicine men began by dusting each other off, making their rattles jingle right against the bodies of their colleagues, and blowing on the tops of their heads or the napes of their necks, as is done for illness. Then all the men, women, and children who had attended the ceremony as spectators were summoned. They sat down and the medicine men and medicine women /given in English/ came to pass their feather brooms over their bodies, to blow on their heads, and to make the rattles jingle along their bodies. These rites were carried out just as scrupulously for the children as for the adults.

/213/ My friend Sanchez was the object of particular pains; after the chief medicine man in person had blown over him, he was assisted by four medicine men, two of whom blew and sang over him, while the other two shook rattles, bells, and maracas.

Those of the medicine men who were not occupied with the disinfecting turned halfway around and repeated all the gestures which they had previously carried out. From time to time one or another again left the row to mow down the grass and furiously engulf the illness. The whistles succeeded each another at intervals which were ever closer together, and the rattles were shaken with more energy and insistence.

The ceremony was over when all the members of the community were considered relieved of the evil influences with which they had been impregnated.

Notes

[164 231] 1. The illness to be expelled was hoof-and-mouth disease, with which the livestock was then stricken, and which had had unfortunate consequences on the health of the people. Several who had eaten contaminated meat had fallen ill.